

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 161719Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY LISBON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9557
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL OPORTO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA
USMISSION NATO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LISBON 8670

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PO
SUBJ: ELECTION ASSESSMENT: EQUILIBRIUM CONFIRMED

REF: (A) LISBON 8629 (DTG 151233Z DEC 76),
(B) LISBON 8552 (DTG 131421Z DEC 76)

SUMMARY: THE DEC 12 ELECTIONS CONFIRMED EXISTING VOTING PATTERNS DESPITE A REDUCED TURNOUT. SOARES AND HIS MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD SOCIALISTS ARE STILL IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT. STABILIZATION OF THE CURRENT LEFT-RIGHT POLITICAL BALANCE UNDERSCORES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIALISTS AND OF THE MODERATING FUNCTION OF PRESIDENT EANES. THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION WILL STEP UP ITS EFFORTS TO CONVINCE THE PRESIDENT TO PLAY A MORE DIRECTIVE ROLE--TO PRESSURE THE SOCIALISTS.
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EANES IS IMPATIENT WITH THE SLOW PACE OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY; WITH THE ELECTION CYCLE COMPLETED HE WILL PRESS FOR MORE FORCEFUL ACTION TO GET THE ECONOMY MOVING. BUT SOARES SHARES THIS VIEW. AND EANES, LIKE ALL OTHER MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURES, SEES NO VIABLE ALTERNATIVE AT PRESENT TO THE SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. EQUILIBRIUM CONFIRMED: THE MOST STRIKING FEATURE OF THE DEC 12 ELECTION RESULTS WAS THE CONFIRMATION OF EXISTING

VOTING PATTERNS DESPITE A REDUCED TURNOUT. THE STABILITY OF VOTER PREFERENCES, CONFIRMED IN THREE NATIONWIDE ELECTIONS DURING THE PAST YEAR, SHOWS:

- THE TOTALITARIAN LEFT (COMMUNISTS AND ULTRA-LEFT) WITH 20-25 PERCENT;
- THE CENTER/RIGHT (SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AND CENTER DEMOCRATS) WITH 40 PERCENT;
- THE SOCIALISTS, AS THE BALANCE WHEEL, SITTING FIRMLY ASTRIDE THE CENTER-LEFT WITH 35 PERCENT.

THE FAILURE OF THE OPPOSITION TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT GAINS AT PS EXPENSE STRENGTHENS SOARES'S HAND AND, BY DEFAULT, REAFFIRMS THE SOCIALIST MANDATE TO GOVERN.

2. EVERYONE A WINNER?: AS EXPECTED, THE MAJOR CONTENDERS HAVE ALL CLAIMED VICTORY. THE VARIETY OF RESULTS AVAILABLE FROM CONTESTS IN HUNDREDS OF MUNICIPALITIES AND THOUSANDS OF PARISHES MADE THIS AN IRRESTIBLE TEMPTATION. IN SEPARATE DEC 13 MEETINGS WITH THE AMBASSADOR, HOWEVER, PRESIDENT EANES AND PRIME MINISTER SOARES WERE MORE CIRCUMSPECT IN EVALUATING THE OUTCOME.

- SOARES WAS PLEASED. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, HE NOTED THAT THE SOCIALISTS HAD HELD THEIR OWN DESPITE MOUNTING ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND UNPOPULAR AUSTERITY MEASURES. COMMUNIST GAINS WERE RELATIVELY MODEST. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE, SOARES POINTED TO THE PS FAILURE TO BREAK THE PCP GRIP ON THE ALENTEJO. SOARES REGRETTED THAT THE TOUGH DEC 8 SPEECH BY AGRICULTURE MINISTER BARRETO AND THE COMPLEMENTARY MEASURES ANNOUNCED BY CONFIDENTIAL

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THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT HAD TIME TO TAKE HOLD. THE SOCIALISTS HAD NOT DONE AS WELL IN THE ISLANDS AS SOARES HAD HOPED; THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS WERE STILL IN FIRM CONTROL IN MADEIRA AND THE AZORES. THE SELF-DESTRUCTION OF THE UDP-LED "POPULAR POWER" MOVEMENT GAVE THE COMMUNISTS MORE ROOM FOR MANEUVER BY REMOVING THE THREAT ON THEIR LEFT.

- PRESIDENT EANES OFFERED A SIMILAR ASSESSMENT. HE STRESSED THAT THERE HAD BEEN LITTLE OVERALL CHANGE IN THE POLITICAL ALIGNMENT. THE COMMUNIST-DOMINATED "PEOPLE UNITED" ELECTION FRONT SWALLOWED UP THE GDUP, WHICH EANES SAYS IT MANIPULATES. THE USE OF POPULAR LOCAL PERSONALITIES AS CANDIDATES HAD HELPED THE PCP, AND THEIR ELECTION FRONT HAD CONFUSED SOME VOTERS WHO UNWITTINGLY SUPPORTED THE COMMUNISTS.

3. THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES: THE STABILITY OF VOTER SENTIMENT REFLECTED IN THE RESULTS HAS STIMULATED THE OPPOSITION SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES.

- SA CARNEIRO, IN A DEC 14 PRESS CONFERENCE, OUTLINED THE PSD PREFERENCE: "...A GOVERNMENT REDUCED IN NUMBERS; SELECTED ACCORDING TO ABILITY; DRAWN FROM THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES AND INDEPENDENTS; WITH A CLEAR PROGRAM TO DEAL WITH THE NATIONAL SITUATION ON AN EMERGENCY BASIS." ABOVE ALL, HE STRESSED,

THE GOVERNMENT MUST HAVE THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PRESIDENT.
-- CDS PRESIDENT FREITAS DO AMARAL, SPEAKING TO THE DIPLOMATIC ASSOCIATION ON THE SAME DAY, POINTED TOWARD A "PRESIDENTIAL" SYSTEM. HE SUGGESTED THAT INITIAL STEPS BE TAKEN IMMEDIATELY, WITH THE PRESIDENT PRESIDING OVER CABINET MEETINGS AND GENERALLY TAKING A MORE ACTIVE LEADERSHIP ROLE. THE CONSTITUTION WOULD BE REVISED IN FOUR YEARS TO INSTITUTIONALIZE THE CHANGE.
-- PCP LEADER CUNHAL HAS REITERATED HIS PRE-ELECTION CALL FOR EITHER A POPULAR FRONT GOVERNMENT COMPOSED OF SOCIALISTS, COMMUNISTS, MILITARY MEN, AND INDEPENDENTS; OR A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL SALVATION, PRESIDED OVER BY AN "APOLITICAL" MILITARY MAN OR CIVILIAN WITH SUPPORT FROM SOCIALISTS AND
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COMMUNISTS.

4. NO CHANGE FOR NOW: ALL THE MAJOR PARTIES AGREE THAT THERE IS NO IMMEDIATE ALTERNATIVE TO THE SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT. A POPULAR FRONT IS NOT IN THE CARDS. NEITHER IS A PS COALITION WITH PARTIES TO ITS RIGHT, THE DESIRES OF THE NEW YORK TIMES" EDITORIAL BOARD

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NOTWITHSTANDING. SA CARNEIRO HAS DROPPED HIS CALLS FOR A COALITION WITH THE SOCIALISTS AND HAS EMERGED AS THE MOST VOCAL GOVERNMENT CRITIC AMONG MAJOR

OPPOSITION LEADERS. IN SHORT, THE ELCTION RESULTS HAVE NOT ALTERED THE BALANCE OF FORCES WITHIN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM. SOARES AND THE MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD SOCIALISTS ARE STILL IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT.

5. SOFT SPOTS REMAIN: REDUCED VOTER TURNOUT POINTS TO POTENTIAL PROBLEMS.

-- SA CARNEIRO ASSERTS THAT THE HIGHER ABSTENTION RATE REFLECTS GROWING DISSATISFACTION WITH THE SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT.

-- FREITAS DO AMARAL SAYS VOTER APATHY STRENGTHENS
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THE ULTRA-RIGHT.

-- GEN KAULZA DE ARRIAGA, THE CURRENT DARLING OF THE TATALITARIAN RIGHT, IS ON RECORD AS CALLING FOR CREATION OF AN "ABOVE-PARTY" POLITICAL MOVEMENT. HE AND OTHERS OF SIMILAR PERSUASION INTERPRET THE LOWER TURNOUT AS A REJECTION OF THE PROCESS ITSELF. ANTICIPATING SOME INITIATIVE BY KAULZA AND HIS FRIENDS, THE LEAD EDITORIAL DEC 15 IN SOCIALIST-ORIENTED "DIARIO DE NOTICIAS" LASHED OUT AT THE FORMER COMMANDER IN MOZAMBIQUE, LABELLING HIM "A GENERAL OF FASCISM."

6. EANES HOLDS THE KEY: THE ELECTION RESULTS -- CONFIRMING STABILIZATION OF A LEFT-RIGHT POLITICAL BALANCE -- ALSO UNDERSCORE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MODERATING FUNCTION OF PRESIDENT EANES. THE DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION HAS LET IT BE KNOWN THAT IT WILL STEP UP EFFORTS TO CONVINCE THE PRESIDENT TO PLAY A MORE DIRECTIVE ROLE -- TO PRESSURE THE SOARES GOVERNMENT. EANES IS IMPATIENT WITH THE SLOW PACE OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY. WITH THE ELECTION CYCLE COMPLETED HE WILL PRESS FOR MORE FORCEFUL ACTION TO GET THE ECONOMY MOVING. BUT SOARES SHARES THIS VIEW. AND EANES, LIKE ALL OTHER MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURES, SEES NO VIABLE ALTERNATIVE AT PRESENT TO THE SOCIALIST GOVERNMENT.
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